

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 7, 2022

Faith Hall
Grant Lead for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: City of Philadelphia's Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program Grant Application

Dear Ms. Hall:

I am pleased to provide this letter of support for the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC), City of Philadelphia (City), and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's (PennDOT) joint application to the FY 2022 Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) grant program titled "Reconnecting Our Chinatown: Reclaiming Philadelphia's Vine Street Expressway (I-676)." If awarded, PCDC, the City, and PennDOT will advance a comprehensive planning and community visioning effort to reconnect Chinatown and other communities harmed by the Vine Street Express (Expressway). The proposed project, which is fully located within economically disadvantaged communities designated by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), seeks to achieve RCP program goals by proactively addressing equity, redressing the legacy of harm caused by transportation infrastructure, restoring community connectivity, and improving community quality of life.

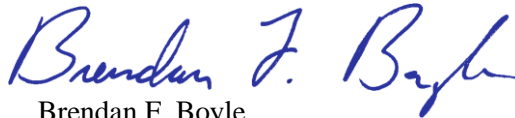
Completed in 1991, the Expressway is a six-lane below-grade Interstate flanked by service roads cutting across central Philadelphia. Altogether, the Expressway and its frontage roads encompass 13 lanes of traffic. The Expressway runs 2.2 miles through the city, cutting through several neighborhoods, including Philadelphia's Chinatown neighborhood, which is the primary focus of this project. Chinatown community members have been actively engaged in transportation advocacy since 1966 when plans for the Expressway were first unveiled. The Save Chinatown Movement emerged in response to the threat posed to the community by the pending Vine Street Expressway construction. This movement was formally incorporated as the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) in 1969. PCDC's founding purpose endures to this day as the organization continues to advocate for residents, local schools, merchants and businesses. PCDC is a capable partner with a track record of community-led projects that mitigate the harmful impacts of the expressway and other large-scale development projects such as the Pennsylvania Convention Center and Gallery at Market East mall.

RCP funding will allow Philadelphia to develop attainable solutions that bridge the divide created by the Expressway and provide Philadelphians, especially within the Chinatown community, with better connections to opportunities and allow residents to enjoy a safer, healthier experience in their neighborhood. More specifically, an RCP grant will fund a study to assess the feasibility of capping the Expressway along with conceptual design and preliminary engineering activities that support an environmental review for construction and an equitable outcomes plan to ensure proposed improvements equitably distribute benefits and mitigate impacts. All planning activities will be guided by meaningful community input overseen by PCDC and the City of Philadelphia and will leverage PCDC's deep network and understanding of the project area.

When funded, the Reconnecting Our Chinatown project will seek to address racial inequities resulting from past infrastructure initiatives. The project is located entirely within “Area of Persistent Poverty” census tracts designated by US DOT. Half of the project area is also located inside priority census tracts identified by the EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping tool. The RCP project will help remedy the disparities in health, safety, connectivity, and environmental justice that have long afflicted Philadelphia’s Chinatown, as well as many other low-income communities and communities of color. It will direct long-overdue infrastructure investments to underserved neighborhoods while focusing on the shared prosperity which is created through community engagement, environmental justice, and equitable development.

The City of Philadelphia and its partners recognize the unprecedented opportunity that RCP funding presents to unify neighborhoods that were divided and marginalized by past infrastructure projects. Grant funding from RCP will help Philadelphia and the Biden administration deliver meaningful change to Philadelphia, and set an equitable and just model for future infrastructure reinvestment. I appreciate your consideration of Philadelphia’s Reconnecting Our Chinatown: Reclaiming Philadelphia’s Vine Street Expressway (I-676) planning grant application and respectfully ask that you give our proposal all due consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brendan F. Boyle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress